

S N O W

A Play in Four Acts

by

STANISLAW PRZYBYSZEWSKI

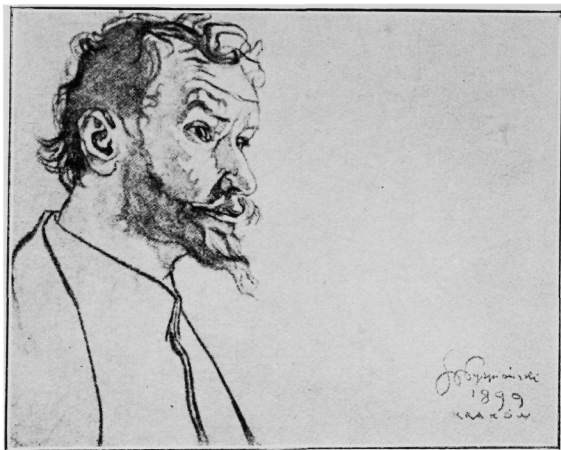
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STANISŁAW PRZYBYSZEWSKI
(After a Portrait by Wyspiński)

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A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS

BY

STANISLAW PRZYBYSZEWSKI

ENGLISH VERSION

BY

O. F. THEIS

NICHOLAS L. BROWN

NEW YORK

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CHARACTERS

WILLY,

BRONKA, *his wife,*

EVA, *her friend,*

ARTHUR, *Willy's brother,*

MOTRUNA,

A FOOTMAN.

ACT I

ACT I

The scene represents a large, richly furnished room with two large windows through which a garden is seen in the background where a heavy snowstorm is raging. Adjoining the room is an orangery, or greenhouse, through whose panes every occurrence can be observed. On the corner is a large, old-fashioned fireplace; beside it lies a heap of brushwood and green hemlock-twigs. ARTHUR nervously throws branch after branch into the glowing fireplace. BRONKA stands at the window and looks very restlessly into the garden, watching the snowstorm.

ARTHUR

Why are you so restless? Don't be childish.
Why are you so uneasy?

BRONKA

But heavens alive, Arthur, can't you see this snowstorm? All day the snow has been falling without end, snow and snow, nothing but snow . . . mountains of snow have piled up. There isn't a tree for miles along the road from the city. The coachman

may lose his way; he may upset the sleigh, and anything may happen.

ARTHUR

What much can happen? Willy will fall in the ditch, and he will lie soft enough there.

BRONKA

How mean you are!

ARTHUR

Please, don't be angry. But sometimes I can't help looking at you two as though you were a pair of children. Your relations seem like an anomaly to one of maturer years. You have been married a year, and you coo and bill as though it were the first day of the honeymoon.

BRONKA

But it is just this which makes our relations so beautiful.

ARTHUR

Naturally, of course! But tell me how many love-letters have you had from your Willy in this week that he has been gone?

BRONKA

Oh, if you only knew what wonderful letters he has written, and the last one, just this last one, is the most beautiful. Oh, how I love these letters! No

human being in all the world has ever spoken such beautiful words of love.

ARTHUR

(*Smiling*) To find beautiful words isn't especially difficult, but Willy really loves you. (*Thoughtfully*) Yes, he loves you deeply . . . I envy both of you your love and happiness . . . (*After a pause*) I have grown quite sentimental since I am here with you. Oftener and oftener I dream silvery idyls of moonlight; more and more frequently I think of such a beautiful warm corner far from the world, where by the side of a woman I love and who loves me, I could quietly dream and think and work. I am tired already and sick of this everlasting dragging of myself from city to city, of this drifting over all the world. Besides it is all humbug! Artistic impressions, museums, theatres, circuses, literature, Italy, Paris — all are humbug, humbug, nothing but humbug! Boredom only grows greater, everywhere in the world everything is always the same, and we drag ourselves through the world with nothing but growing and growing boredom in the heart.

BRONKA

How sad you are, Arthur! In no other human being have I ever met such infinite sadness.

ARTHUR

That may be.

BRONKA

If you only could or would fall in love. Don't you think . . . ?

ARTHUR

I, fall in love? With whom? At the most with you, and heaven knows it would take much to make me do that.

BRONKA

(Laughing) Stupid! What would you do with a girl like me? She wouldn't be your sort.

ARTHUR

(Likewise jestingly) Exactly, exactly . . . she would be just the one for me. I am tired of the stupid, vain peacock-women who love to play the rôle of a demon. Not satisfied with this, they must season the whole performance with wearisome and tasteless jugglery of temperament and passion. I am tired of these nauseous, slimy angels of inspiration. I am more than tired of the hunchbacked hags of higher learning, and of all the females that labor for the general good. Oh, believe me, Bronka, I have grown tired unto death in my association with that sort, with those . . . they call them the better half of a man's soul. *(He brushes across his forehead and walks back and forth in the room; then he*

throws several branches into the fireplace) What I need is just this, a soft, simple girl . . . (*Dreamily*) To spend entire evenings by the side of a huge fireplace with one who is absolutely innocent, who knows nothing of either virtue or sin. This happiness of feeling beside yourself a woman who knows nothing of principles, theories, or tendencies, but who is only a heart, a pure and ardent heart! Do you understand that? Surely one would then forget all the humbug and boredom.

BRONKA

What self-deception! You would be happy with a girl like that for two days, and then . . . then . . . You can finish this sorry song by yourself in your own soul.

ARTHUR

Do you think so? Do you really think so? But yet isn't it strange that I am spending day after day with just such a simple girl, as you call her, that I am confessing to you the most intimate things of my life, that I am sharing every thought with you, and yet have never for a single moment been bored? On the contrary, I have never experienced such happy and peaceful hours, as here with you. (*In a tone of light banter*) Do you know, Bronka, I shall really seriously fall in love with you.

BRONKA

(*Imitating his tone*) If you had not said all this

so wearily, so sadly, and all the while thinking of something quite different, I might really believe that you were bidding for my favor . . .

ARTHUR

(Laughing) Why should I not woo, sweet sister-in-law? The art of being able to intoxicate one's self and others may be very beautiful and noble . . . just as if one were to intoxicate one's self with a bottle of fiery Amontillado.

BRONKA

But I have no desire whatever to drink this fiery Amontillado . . . *(Suddenly, distracted)* What can it mean that Willy hasn't come yet? I tell you the coachman has upset the sleigh.

ARTHUR

Don't be so restless and impatient. The snow is deep, and besides they can't drive the horses to death.

BRONKA

Of course, you are right. *(Irritated)* Besides you — your bored manner and cold melancholy are enough so to depress and alarm anybody, that . . . that . . .

ARTHUR

What? . . . Say it!

BRONKA

I have grown so restless that I am as likely as not

to run upstairs and wake Eva. I don't understand why she is always sleeping since she has arrived.

ARTHUR

Sleeping? Perhaps, she doesn't sleep.

BRONKA

Do you believe then that she is avoiding us?

ARTHUR

Who knows? Perhaps she is convinced that we are more at ease when she is not present.

BRONKA

You are mean. She has always been my best friend. You cannot imagine how happy I was when she came here at my invitation. I haven't seen her for two years . . . But, do you know, Arthur, she has changed completely. I should never have believed that a human being could change so absolutely in so short a time.

ARTHUR

Did I understand you correctly? Has she really changed so completely?

BRONKA

(*Slightly embarrassed*) I don't know how to explain it to you . . . I still have something of the shyness of a boarding-school girl . . . but I can tell you everything, everything, for to me you aren't like a man at all.

ARTHUR

Well said. But tell me something about Eva. I am very curious.

BRONKA

Very well! She is an orphan, but very rich. And her whole misfortune is that she has always been able to satisfy every whim, and so she has never found complete satisfaction in anything she has done. . . . I really meant to ask you about this. . . . (*Suddenly*) Listen to me, and try to understand me correctly! She and I were together in a boarding-school, bound to each other with a strange love. She loved me to madness, so that her love was sometimes a torment to me. Then at other times she was endlessly good; she was a lamb with which I could play for days in a stretch, a slave who read my thoughts in my eyes. Then suddenly she was again capricious, tyrannical, jealous of my every heartbeat. . . .

ARTHUR

Well? And what then?

BRONKA

After the death of his wife, her guardian took her out of school, and since then she has become mistress of herself, her wealth, her melancholy, and, perhaps, also of her ennui . . . You see, Arthur . . . she would be a wife for you.

ARTHUR

Hm, hm, but you haven't said anything yet as to why there was a sudden change in her.

BRONKA

Now, you see, how distracted I am. I can't even think to the end of a sentence. (*Thoughtfully*) You see, in spite of all her caprices and sudden outbursts, in spite of all her melancholy and ennui, she was really very jolly and high-spirited. At school she was the leader, that led us into the worst kinds of mischief. Everything was a joke to her, and she made game of everybody . . . But now . . . I can't very well reason it out to myself . . . I merely feel it, that . . . do you know, Arthur, it is awfully difficult to confess it, but I will tell you honestly, she has become curiously strange to me. I am no longer so at ease with her as formerly. I have such a strange feeling of unrest with her . . . Oh, how beautiful she is! Have you noticed, how beautiful she is?

ARTHUR

I haven't looked at her closely enough as yet.

BRONKA

Man alive! Are you blind? Have you actually ceased being a man?

ARTHUR

May be you are right . . . I am beginning to be

really interested in your guest. But now tell me, to what do you attribute this sudden change in her? A broken heart? Unrequited love? Which do you think?

BRONKA

A broken heart, unrequited love? Oh, no, my dear fellow, no!

ARTHUR

But how can you be so sure?

BRONKA

You see, I know all the young people of her set, and know that every one was merely a plaything for her . . . The only man she might have loved was Willy, my Willy. But of love there was not a trace, because there was an antipathy between them which kept them apart.

ARTHUR

You don't say so? Willy knew her then, before he married you?

BRONKA

Yes, of course, didn't you know?

ARTHUR

(*Offhand*) And they did not fall in love with each other?

BRONKA

Do you imagine that I would have asked Eva into my house if I had for a single second suspected my

husband of having been in love with her? If I did not know that they were strangers?

ARTHUR

Yes, of course, you are right, or rather possibly you may be right. I am not acquainted with the feminine heart to that extent.

BRONKA

I am only afraid whether Willy may not be annoyed that I have so suddenly urged Eva to visit us without his knowing anything about it. Perhaps, Willy would have preferred to rest here alone with you and me for a couple of days after his return . . . But you know, I couldn't help myself. She is closer to me, I love her more than my sister who died . . . but to Willy she is a stranger . . . (*The ringing of sleighbells driving into the yard is heard.* BRONKA, *with a joyous cry*) Willy has come! Willy has come! At last!

(She runs out through the door)

ARTHUR

(Sits alone and looks after BRONKA with an expression of deep sorrow. He nervously tugs his beard, again throws a couple of branches into the fire, rises, and walks up and down in the room. Suddenly he stands still, takes his head in his two hands, and says to himself) Yes, yes, that's how things are . . . Too late, too late . . .

(He pulls himself together, sits down, begins smoking a cigarette, and remains seated lost in thought. In the anteroom BRONKA's voice is heard vibrant with joy and the certitude of love)

BRONKA

(Behind the scene) My Willy, my darling, precious Willy!

ARTHUR

(Starting suddenly) Bronka's voice! Oh you, my only own! How I have yearned for you all my life!

(His face is contorted into a piteous smile.)

BRONKA runs on the stage, dragging WILLY behind her)

BRONKA

Come, come, come, dearie, run, run! You're all frozen through! Sit down here by the fireplace.

WILLY

But, my dear, my furs are very warm, and I am not frozen through at all. *(He exchanges most affectionate greetings with his brother ARTHUR)* Well, Arthur, have you taken good care of the house? And you haven't turned Bronka's head with your metaphysics and your art ideals?

ARTHUR

On the contrary, I was all the time trying to pre-

pare Bronka for the fact that I wasn't ever going to leave your house again.

WILLY

Didn't I tell you that you would feel happy here!

BRONKA

But come, Willy, come! Sit down by the fireplace! You are frozen through and through!

WILLY

Thanks for your fireplace, I am not at all frozen through. My furs are too warm. But one thing — I'd enjoy a brandy and a bite to eat.

BRONKA

Surely, right away!
(*She runs off*)

WILLY

(*Very happily*) Well, Arthur? I have after all found peace and happiness. I did not dare to dream of such happiness. Before I knew Bronka, it seemed to me that all the forces of life had died in me. The heart was dried up, like shavings of wood. The soul was wounded . . . and this horrible, hellish boredom, this hereditary boredom of ours, was already beginning to weigh upon me like a nightmare.

ARTHUR

I know, I know, let's say no more about it. You

were in a hopeless condition then. I read every letter of yours with fear and trembling, expecting suddenly to hear this: "Dear Arthur, I am bored unto death, and so I prefer to lie down upon Abraham's bosom." . . . I wasn't really anxious, for death is the only remedy for boredom. Still it is unpleasant to receive a letter like that from a brother one loves . . . (*Suddenly*) But tell me why did you, whom I remember as always so strong, vigorous, and courageous, so full of life and power — why did you get into this strange, suicidal conflict with yourself? No one need have been surprised in my case, for I have always been a duffer and a muddlehead, but you . . . you . . .

WILLY

It would be a long story, and the telling of the horrible torments which I have experienced would only bore you . . . But let me tell you one thing. I would long since have gone to perdition, if I had not met Bronka.

ARTHUR

(*Carelessly*) The cause of your break-down was a woman?

WILLY

Yes and no, God knows . . . a strange and to me unknown yearning, an unstilled desire . . . for what? I don't know . . .

ARTHUR

The woman was evil, she hurt you?

WILLY

No, not that. . . . She had merely lost contact with life. She tortures herself and others to death, and cannot render any account to herself of what she does or what she wants . . . some insane desire for something that is unobtainable has bewitched her . . . If you knew, how I tormented myself.

ARTHUR

And what then?

WILLY

What then? . . . Hm . . . she wished to be a slave, and it was her destiny that she had to be a master. I was too much afraid of losing her, but I did not know how to dominate her. Oh, how I have despised myself! Hated her and myself! But all that did not help.

ARTHUR

Tell me everything — everything.

WILLY

The end of this ballad of despair is soon sung.

ARTHUR

And since then you have not seen her again?

WILLY

The last sign of life from her came on the day of

my engagement. I had a letter from her so full of sincerity and warmth that I forgot all that she had done to me.

ARTHUR

Perhaps that was only one of the spiteful, cunning perfidies of a woman.

WILLY

No, indeed, she was Bronka's best friend. She had loved her with an insensate passionate love, and was truly happy, as she wrote me, that Bronka was getting for husband, a man whom she herself could only have made unhappy.

ARTHUR

(*Searchingly*) And since then you have not seen her again?

WILLY

No.

ARTHUR

And you never think of her?

WILLY

No, in my heart, in my brain, there is room only for Bronka.

ARTHUR

And if you should see her all of a sudden?

WILLY

(*Thoughtfully*) If I should see her all of a sud-

den? — Oh, no . . . it would no longer make any impression on me. The love for her has long since fallen to ashes. Besides, how do I know whether what I suffered on her account was love at all. Perhaps, it was only a nobleman's pride, that of one who had hitherto never met an obstacle on his path and who was now enraged to madness to have met a woman who offered resistance . . . Just remember at the same time, how ashamed I was of myself, my feeling of uncertainty and unsatisfied desire, and you can, perhaps, form an idea of my state of mind. (*Rises and walks about the room*) If I were to see her suddenly? . . . So totally unexpected . . . Hm, perhaps, something would flash up in the bottom of my soul . . .

ARTHUR

It is a fact then that you are not quite as sure of yourself as you say.

WILLY

True, if I didn't have Bronka at my side. But you see, with my joyous nature, always eager for action, I would not feel at home within the cold, mournful, medieval walls within which Eva alone could live. There the nights were spectre-filled. All manner of spooks were at home there. My energy melted like wax in fire, and the cursed melancholy gnawed the marrow out of my spine. Now look at me. My

head is made to bathe in the sun, and my fist to enter the lists and meet a still greater force than I am myself, if necessary. (*He stretches out his arms and suddenly gaily claps his hands*) Bronka, why so long? Come!

BRONKA

(*Behind the scene*) Right away, right away . . .

ARTHUR

And where did you meet Bronka?

WILLY

At my uncle's. In the forest. She was riding a magnificent stallion. It suddenly shied at something and ran away with her. From a distance I saw her like an Amazon riding at such a mad pace that the belly of the animal touched the ground. I thought to myself that this pace was surely not intentional . . . I merely marvelled at the magnificent way in which the girl held the saddle. I don't know by what extraordinary means I brought the animal to a dead stop. I lost consciousness and lay in bed several weeks, but in return I have won Bronka, peace and happiness.

ARTHUR

A truly extraordinary adventure.

WILLY

Really extraordinary. I have often read in novels

of such cases and laughed at them, and then a thing like that had to happen to my very self.

(BRONKA enters, followed by a servant, bearing a tea-tray with cold food and drinks)

BRONKA

(Nestling up to WILLY) How impatient you are right away! I wanted to prepare everything with my own hands . . . all the things you like best.

WILLY

But why such a lot?

BRONKA

Dinner is still a long way off. Come eat — eat.

ARTHUR

(Pours a brandy into a glass and drinks to WILLY) What a driving snowstorm! You can hardly see farther than the end of your nose.

BRONKA

If you only knew how anxious I was about you!

ARTHUR

Yes, indeed — she had a regular anxiety psychosis. She had the most horrible visions right in front of her all the time.

WILLY

(Taking her by the head) Oh, you incorrigible child, you. One can't go even a step away from you.

BRONKA

Because I know that as long as you are with me nothing serious can happen to you.

WILLY

(Rises suddenly and strikes his forehead) It is incredible! I have the brains of a bird. Wait, wait — I will be back in a moment.

(He starts to go)

BRONKA

Where are you going?

WILLY

Soon, soon, I'll be back . . . a little surprise for you.

(WILLY'S voice is heard calling behind the scene: "Paul, Paul!")

BRONKA

(As gay as a child) Probably he is having another one of those precious surprises in store for me as so many times before. I am really angry with him. I have enough of velvets and silk and shawls from Persia and Afghanistan. He positively loads me down with them.

ARTHUR

He loves you, and for a man in love there is no greater pleasure than to prepare such surprises. But listen, Bronka, you too have a surprise in store

for him. I am just wondering whether he will like it. Willy is now perfectly happy, and happiness *à deux* is jealous and egotistical. Even I myself am often afraid that I am in your way, and now a woman, to whom, you say, Willy was always antagonistic . . .

BRONKA

(*Eagerly*) Oh, no — no . . . All our woman's strategy lies in just this. If we wish to keep a man's love always fresh, we must now and then keep at a distance from him, give him free rein. I considered the matter a long while, and I have done well to let Eva come. I'll play, read, and take walks with her, and Willy can go hunting with his neighbors or drive to the city, and he will return to me with all the greater eagerness.

ARTHUR

I should never have thought that my little sister-in-law could be so crafty.

BRONKA

Not crafty at all. It is merely the method of our mothers and grandmothers, and it has stood the test.

ARTHUR

Very well! But nevertheless I am anxious that nothing should happen to-day to upset Willy's good humor. And I love him as he is now, so full of energy, so bubbling over with life, and so sure of himself. It was only with you that he found his balance.

BRONKA

You needn't be anxious about Willy. If you didn't roam around with your hang-dog look, and if you won't put me in an ill-humor this evening . . . I am sorry. Here, you may kiss my hand. (*ARTHUR holds her hand in his but does not kiss it*) Well, what does this mean?

ARTHUR

Nothing, nothing at all. I merely took the liberty of holding your dear, gentle, sweet child's hand for a moment in mine. It makes me feel as though a crust of ice round my heart were melting.

(He kisses her hand. BRONKA looks piercingly at him)

BRONKA

You are really very melancholy and very tired, Arthur.

ARTHUR

That is always the way, if one hasn't been born under a lucky star like Willy.

WILLY

(Enters and spreads out a long, costly shawl at BRONKA's feet) I really should have spread this shawl at your feet all the way from the house to the sleigh when you ran out so joyously to meet me. And like an idiot, I had hidden it so far down under the

seat that I forgot all about it. It took a glass of brandy to bring it to my mind.

BRONKA

(*Throwing herself around his neck*) Oh, you darling, you precious dear, you incurable spend-thrift . . .

ARTHUR

(*Looks at both and then rises*) Now, I'll leave you alone with your happiness, and write a couple of letters. (*Turning to BRONKA*) And for the big celebration at dinner, I suppose I'll have to dress.

BRONKA

What else did you suppose?

ARTHUR

Well then, *au revoir* till later. (*Stops at the window*) Oh, when will this snow stop? (*Turning to WILLY*) How happy you must be, that the snow does not have to fall with sorrow and weariness upon your soul.

(*Exit*)

BRONKA

(*Looking after ARTHUR*) What's wrong with Arthur? He is so curiously sad and solemn.

WILLY

Don't you feel easy in his company? Haven't you gotten used to him yet?

BRONKA

You know how fond we are of each other. He affects me like a soothing, lusterless autumn sun. He is a bit lugubrious, it is true, but good and gentle . . .

WILLY

Yes. . . . Our race is dying out. He and I are the last scions of an old, once powerful stock.

BRONKA

Oh, in you it won't die out. How strong and powerful and young you now are! How your face radiates with happiness and consciousness of power!

WILLY

(Puts his arm around her, leads her slowly to the fireplace, and sits down beside her, both in a close embrace) Your love, your love has given me this sure consciousness of strength and power.

BRONKA

How your eyes glow! As though you would conquer the entire world! And then again they are so infinitely kind and trustful *(She kisses his eyes)* that I would kiss them again and again — kiss them without end, bury myself in them without another thought —

WILLY

(Resting his head on her breast) You are my

only happiness — Oh, how I love it — this, your beautiful, your glorious love!

BRONKA

(Playing with his hair) Ah, what soft hair you have! I have the feeling that it isn't hair at all that I am touching, but some infinitely soft bed of grass, or a heap of eider-down feathers. Do you know, there was a plot of such fine feathery grass in front of my father's house. How I always loved to bury myself in this grass! Just so I would love to bury myself in your hair . . .

(She presses a long kiss upon his hair)

WILLY

And do you remember when the horse ran away with you?

BRONKA

I was frightened to death, I lost all consciousness, and yet all the time I felt a strange joy in being borne by this noble, bridleless animal.

WILLY

And do you remember when I took you up in my arms across my breast and carried you up and down the room?

(He raises her on his knees)

BRONKA

Oh, you, my only own! It is usual, they say, for a

modest, young girl to weep at the marriage-altar. I did not weep. I wanted to cry, cry out aloud with happiness and joy that we would soon, soon be in the sleigh — with two mad stallions ahead — racing toward you, toward you, your house.

WILLY

And do you remember that icy January night? The heavens sparkled and the snow sparkled and the horses raced until they were covered over and over with a white foam, and how with all the force within me I held my marvelous happiness pressed close to me.

*(He holds her very close. At the windows
EVA is seen passing by slowly. She stands
still looking at the two. Her shadow disappears)*

BRONKA

Oh, hold me closer, closer, still closer, just like then, when you wrapped me in your furs . . . *(She withdraws suddenly)* But tell me why, when we were already in the house, for a moment such a cold steely look suddenly came into your eyes?

WILLY

It was then that I put a gravestone over all my past.

BRONKA

'And what sort of past had you?

WILLY

What sort of a past? A large, rich and terribly sad past: A Golgotha of agony and heartache; A Gehenna of internal struggles, misery, an endless series of ups and downs and again despair, hatred for myself and all the world.

BRONKA

Have you ever loved before?

WILLY

How do I know, whether that was love? Perhaps, it only seemed so to me, I loved. I don't want to set up any theory as to what love really is or is not, but I do believe that in every real love there must be a proud, sovereign confidence in the beloved and in one's own love. This sureness of your love and mine I have never felt anywhere except with you.

BRONKA

(*Caressing him*). Willy, be honest. I talked a lot about Eva with Arthur to-day.

WILLY

(*Surprised, a little darkly*) About Eva?

BRONKA

Why yes! about Eva . . . But why have you become so solemn all of a sudden?

WILLY

Not at all. I merely suddenly remembered, how

in the very first weeks of our marriage you wanted to glory in our happiness before her. And I didn't want anything except to be alone with you — alone with you . . . For happiness in love is very fragile, and may be broken by the least little thing.

BRONKA

(*Anxiously*) By what for instance?

WILLY

Usually the atmosphere of a strange person is to blame. And you know, that Eva has now changed much . . . Arthur is my brother, and besides gentle and sad. His effect is as you have truly said like that of a mild, lusterless autumn sun . . . But Eva is something quite different. She is like the crater of an extinct volcano. You believe it has been dead long since, and suddenly fire and lava burst forth.

BRONKA

How do you happen to know her so well?

WILLY

How? You know, I had to see her off and on. She roused my curiosity, just as Arthur is made curious by a picture he doesn't know or a rare exotic flower or even a beautiful thoroughbred animal . . .

BRONKA

(*Uneasily*) Willy, Willy . . .

WILLY

(*Surprised*) What is the matter, Bronka? What is wrong?

BRONKA

(*Hurriedly*) I have often heard that love grows weaker, if two people are always and eternally together. They say that they must separate for a while, that each must go his own way for a time to keep love always fresh, and to make them desire each other the more . . . I do not know what put the idea in my head, but I began all of a sudden to wish that you would go hunting, visit your neighbors . . . and then again . . . It wouldn't be possible for me to sit here all alone in the house and wait for you, wait . . . (*Eva is again seen behind the windows; she now remains standing and looks at the two sitting by the fireplace with their backs toward her. She looks at them with an expression of sullen, wild pain. Then she shrinks back*) I am right, am I not, Willy? Tell me, that I am right . . .

WILLY

But, Bronka, where did all these ideas come from so all at once? (*He draws her close to himself*) Is it possible for any man after living with a woman for a year to love her more than I do you? Can a person want any one more than I want you?

BRONKA

(Suddenly) Willy, your letters, your precious, dear letters. And the last one, the most beautiful one . . . I carry it always here over my heart.

(She shows him the letter, kisses it, and puts it back again)

EVA

(Has been seen walking impatiently up and down behind the scene during the preceding dialogue. With sudden determination she goes to the door. With assumed calm) I heard voices in the room, and your rugs are too soft for you to hear my footsteps.

WILLY

(With deep fright, trembling) What is that? Who is it?

EVA

I am not disturbing any one? May I come in?

BRONKA

(Not hearing her) Willy, what is the matter? *(Turns around)* Oh, it is you, Eva! Come right in, come! How pleased Willy will be!

(Eva slowly enters the room. Willy looks at her with a distracted expression, as though he were dreaming a horrible dream)

ACT II

ACT II

The same room as before. The dusk of a winter afternoon. The snow shows behind the windows with a bluish sheen. A fire burns in the fireplace. After a little while EVA and WILLY enter.

EVA

(Walks over to the fireplace and warms her hands)
Oh, how cold I am, how cold . . . and I thought I would find warmth here with you.

WILLY

Never and nowhere will you find warmth.

EVA

And yet I came here for that very purpose, to warm my heart at your happiness.

WILLY

To warm one's heart, one must have a heart.

EVA

So—o—o?

WILLY

Yes, exactly so. But let that pass. During all the time that we were out walking *(He looks care-*

lessly at the clock), and it was almost three hours, it seems to me we exchanged more than enough in the way of compliments. We might, perhaps, now begin to talk of something else.

EVA

By all means, please begin . . . But first have them light the lights . . . It is twilight — such a strangely dull fire in the fireplace . . . bluish gleam of snow behind the windows — these soft rugs — these heavy curtains . . . Yes, indeed . . . Things may become dangerous. All this sets the heart to beating, lights up old desires . . . (*Looks thoughtfully about her*) Did you, yourself, furnish the entire house?

WILLY

Yes, I myself.

EVA

Fully conscious of what you were doing?

WILLY

Of course.

EVA

You know then that your house is merely a copy of mine?

WILLY

Of course, I know it.

EVA

And why did you do it?

WILLY

To try out my strength, to prove to myself that I had forgotten everything, thrown off the nightmare.

EVA

(Smiling quietly) And is this the reason too why you have hung my portrait — the one I painted myself and gave to you — in your study?

WILLY

You were in my study?

EVA

All night long before you returned, I sat there.

WILLY

And what did you do there?

EVA

What did I do there? . . . I was happy that you love me so much, and that you desire me so intensely.

WILLY

But this time you are very much mistaken.

EVA

No, no, I am not mistaken. Your study looks more like a kind of shrine in which you seek refuge from your happiness, from your warm place by Bronka's side, and from her coral-red lips. There you tear your heart open and yearn with all the force within

you, and desire for that which drives your heart to madness . . . Oh, to desire, to yearn, to desire. . . .

WILLY

What for?

EVA

For all that which makes up the torment of unsatisfied desire in you. You were born for battle. There was a time when you wished to be a leader, to conquer new worlds, not for the sake of possession, but for the sake of the joy of being able to stand out as the lord of victory in the midst of the corpses and heaps of ruin, of taking off the helmet and wiping the sweat from your brow. Isn't it so? . . . This life here is not for you — this quiet corner by the fireplace, these soft rugs. It would be a fit place now for your brother, whose soul is already touched with mildew.

WILLY

(*Looking at her very earnestly*) First of all, tell me why did you come here? Surely your criminal instincts are not so developed that you wish by force to destroy the peace and happiness of two human beings? And in addition the happiness of a man whose life you almost wrecked once before?

EVA

(*Laughs*) Almost! Too bad I let you off so easily.

WILLY

You did not let me off; I myself broke the chains.

EVA

(Looks thoughtfully and fixedly into the fire)
Yes, that is true. I admired your force and your strength, and at that time I began to love you.

WILLY

(Laughs ironically) Oh, I know, I know. But permit me to go on, and do not always interrupt me. Please, answer my question: why did you come here?

EVA

You don't know, then, that it is at Bronka's urgent invitation? She even lied a little bit to get me to come here. She wrote she was ill.

WILLY

In spite of that you should not have entered this house.

EVA

(Surprised) And why not? *Your* heart cried out for me incessantly, you have wanted me so terribly all the time . . .

WILLY

I? I have wanted you? I have cried out for you? But I have absolutely and wholly forgotten you.

EVA

(*Sadly*) You have not forgotten me. Your entire house is filled, permeated with me. As soon as I crossed the threshold of your house, I felt that it was my house, that I rule here with undivided sway, that I fill its every nook and corner.

WILLY

Umph . . . You are probably thinking of the furniture. Well, let me tell you, that I intentionally imitated the arrangements of your house. A drunkard, for instance, if he wishes to prove to himself that he is entirely rid of his habit, will now and then drink a glass or two of brandy, however much he may dislike the taste . . . if he doesn't empty the entire bottle at one draught, he may regard himself as cured . . . Do you understand? I furnished the house as I did intentionally, to try my strength, and to prove to myself each and every day that I am free of you.

EVA

(*Maliciously*) And yet . . .

WILLY

And yet . . . You never entered my mind; you never even appeared in my dreams.

EVA

(*Throwing branches into the fire as if not hearing anything that WILLY says*) You have suffered

much, my poor friend. Much of wrath and torment and disgust must have dwelled in your soul. It is too bad — to have all the foundations for happiness, riches, a strong soul, a beautiful, young wife who loves and is loved . . . But do you really love her? Perhaps, you are merely wearied of the battle and the horrible torments of life, and now in the midst of the battlefield you wish to take off your helmet and wipe the sweat from your brow?

WILLY

(*Ironically*) There was a time when your pretty figures of speech gave me pleasure; they don't mean anything to me now.

EVA

(*Paying no attention*) You are only happy now, because you are resting in the greenest of green valleys, and are renewing your strength in order again to storm the mountains. Oh, if it were like that, how I would love you!

WILLY

Listen, Eva! You must leave this house. Let us stop playing with dots and dashes and unspoken words. You know what a power you once had over me. Snow, soft white snow has covered all the memories and all the pain and all the torment and all the struggles, but if the snow should melt . . .

EVA

Well, what then?

WILLY

Then, it would be fatal.

EVA

Fatal? For whom?

WILLY

For you, for me, but especially for Bronka.

EVA

(Brushing across her forehead) For Bronka, for Bronka . . . I loved her deeply . . . *(After a pause)* True, true, she will be very unhappy.

WILLY

(Steps close to her and then sits down) Listen to me! Please pay close attention, and try to understand me. You have a habit of not understanding what you do not want to understand.

EVA

(Indifferently) I shall listen, and I shall understand.

WILLY

I will confess quite honestly that I am really very much on edge and restless. I will admit even more. I have thought of you almost incessantly, I was even hungry for the torments which you used to inflict on

me, but now leave me in peace. I love Bronka, and I shall stay with Bronka.

EVA

If you stay here you will torment her to death. The wounds in your heart have opened again. You are making for the flame like a moth. From the moment that you heard my voice your carefully built palace of happiness has fallen down like a house of cards . . . (*Ironically*) You can't deceive me. This soft warm corner by the fireplace is too narrow for you. Everything in you is bursting and straining. Your former soul has come to life again — to face dangers, to overcome obstacles, to conquer worlds. You are the last one of the magnificent race of conquistadors, whom this stupid corner, called Europe, could no longer satisfy.

WILLY

(*Bitingly*) Thanks for these new worlds, which I am to conquer by slaughtering herds of idiotic sheep.

EVA

No, I didn't mean it that way. First, you must subdue the sea, cut through the mountains, endure all misery and sorrow, so that this new world may unfold in all its magnificence under the eye of the conquistador. And that the conqueror must tread down under iron heel even the fairest flower-bed, that he must slaughter a herd of sheep, or even cut down the

finest forest, concealing a splendid view . . . of what importance is that? (*Always more dreamily*) All that is of no importance whatever . . .

WILLY

And what then?

EVA

Slowly, slowly . . . (*Suddenly laughing aloud*) How the conqueror's blood always boils over in you! (*Looks at him and then collapses again*) First you must subdue the sea, cut through and undermine mountains, on the way stamp down with iron heel even the loveliest flower-bed . . .

WILLY

(*Threateningly*) By that you mean Bronka? (*EVA remains silent and again throws branches into the fire. WILLY, significantly*) By that you really meant Bronka?

EVA

Yes.

(*They are silent. WILLY walks excitedly back and forth in the room*)

WILLY

(*Stepping close to EVA*) Please, Eva, I beg of you, leave us in peace.

EVA

But there will no longer be any peace for you.

WILLY

I know that, I know that, but at least Bronka will have peace.

EVA

You see, Willy, you have already become totally blind to everything round about you. Didn't you see how restlessly her eyes followed you, how she sought to read your thought, how nervous she grew — and how all the time her look wandered from you to me, from me to you, searching, questioning? Oh, how I love her, how I love her! And how nervous she was, how she always turned to Arthur, as if seeking help from him.

(They are silent. WILLY is very uneasy)

WILLY

Hm . . . And you think that I was born to conquer new worlds? To what end?

EVA

To live in beauty, to be beautiful one's self, to feel one's self acting beautifully.

WILLY

And if one hasn't the power to conquer anything?

EVA

Then you fall, but even that is beautiful.

WILLY

But if everything is merely a purposeless struggle,

an insensate mania for destruction, incapable of building anything out of the ruins?

EVA

Even that is beautiful! A man who fights, who slaves, and wears himself out in bloody struggle to achieve the unobtainable, is beautiful.

WILLY

Hm . . . And if he desires nothing except peace and quiet in a soft, warm corner by the fireplace?

EVA

That is very well for Arthur.

WILLY

And for me?

EVA

(Looks at him for a long time and then smiles)
For you? Only I! I alone!

WILLY

(Remains standing, with stifled voice) Why did you then, when I laid everything at your feet; at that time when with you and through you I wished to conquer the new worlds of which you now speak; why, tell me, why did you then repulse me?

EVA

You did not know how to be my master.

WILLY

And now?

EVA

Now I love you. I love you because you wanted to forget me, because you wished to conquer yourself, for only the strong know how to conquer themselves. Now I love you with all the desires of my heart and with a tormenting fear, that now, perhaps, you may no longer want me.

WILLY

(*Laughing nervously*) But now really, it is time that we light the lamp. (*He lights the lamp*) Bronka may come in any moment and suspect us of having sweet *heures de confidence* behind her back.

(*They are silent*)

EVA

(*Offhand*) Did you knock about the world for a long time?

WILLY

(*Looks at her in surprise and then assumes the same tone*) Almost two years.

EVA

They say you were in Africa.

WILLY

(*Ironically*) Yes, I was there, but everything in the way of new worlds there had already been dis-

covered by Stanley. I whiled away the time in hunting tigers . . . Yes, indeed! . . . You are right, I was really made to be a conquistador. When a tiger tore a couple of negroes to bits, I really hadn't the slightest sensation of triumph.

EVA

(Ironically) But?

WILLY

I had only one thought, that my turn would be next.

EVA

And you had no weapon with you?

WILLY

The cartridges were wet.

EVA

And you were not afraid of death?

WILLY

Hadn't I been looking for it? It is beautiful too, to be torn into shreds by such a magnificent, regal beast.

EVA

Yes, that, too, is beautiful . . . But I hear Bronka coming.

(BRONKA and ARTHUR are heard in animated conversation in the anteroom. They enter)

BRONKA

(With artificial animation) Oh, if you only knew what a wonderful sleighride it was! The sparkling crystals of snow on the ice, and the moon, the moon . . . Oh, how glorious it was! Wasn't it, Arthur? You said so yourself, that it was glorious. *(To EVA)* To-morrow you must go with us. Everything is just as if made for you — the snow, the moon and Arthur, Arthur . . . yes, indeed! . . . take a look at Arthur! So bored and so tired, and I have never seen any one who can skate as gracefully as he.

ARTHUR

Bronka exaggerates as usual. It wasn't quite as glorious as all that. They had indeed swept the snow from the pond, but a lot of it was still left, so much that my dear sister-in-law could wade in it up to her knees.

BRONKA

(Absent-mindedly) Oh, what a liar, what a liar . . . Oh, you bad, bad man! *(Suddenly to WILLY)* Willy, perhaps you are annoyed that we stayed out so long. But my heart didn't feel any scruples. I knew that you were here with my darling Eva. I intentionally wanted you to put off your country squire's cloak after a year, and go together with her to those places which are too high for me. *(She nestles close to EVA)* Eva, Eva, how happy you are.

You are so absolutely different from all the rest of us women. How well I remember the time when I came to you after my engagement all radiant with happiness. Are you listening, Willy? The room in which we then sat looked exactly like this. (*Suddenly, as if she were waking up out of a deep sleep*) Eva, it is very strange, but the room was furnished to its least detail just like ours.

EVA

There is nothing very strange in that. That's probably, entirely accidental.

WILLY

(*Cold and hard*) No doubt the same man furnished both our homes.

BRONKA

Hm . . . I suppose so . . . Do you remember, Eva, how we sat by the fireplace? I talked to you and talked without end, endlessly — I don't remember any more what a heap of things I chattered together, and you were so kind to me and listened so patiently . . .

(*She suddenly breaks out into impetuous laughter*)

WILLY

What is the matter with you, Bronka? Why are you so nervous to-day?

BRONKA

You see, I want to fly, fly high and always higher, like a bird, and helplessly I strike only the earth with my wings, and I want to go up, up, without end, but the wings are heavy as lead . . . Eva, how happy you are!

ARTHUR

(*Concerned*) You see, I told you right away that such a run wasn't good for the health, and now you'll have to do penance for your romantics.

BRONKA

(*Defiantly*) No, I shall not do penance. Enough of this stupid nervousness. I am a stupid, spoiled child.

(She suddenly breaks into tears and runs into the adjoining room. EVA is about to follow her)

WILLY

No, please stay. I will calm her very quickly.
(*He follows BRONKA*)

ARTHUR

(*Uneasily*) Bronka is probably ill. She is so upset. I have never seen her like that.

EVA

Neither have I.

ARTHUR

(*Suddenly*) But you must have noticed what a change has come over Bronka since yesterday.

EVA

Just a moment ago I told your brother this very thing.

ARTHUR

Did you notice her restlessness last night and all through to-day?

EVA

I did, and that is why I am so surprised.

ARTHUR

And have you no idea as to the reason for this sudden change?

EVA

No.

ARTHUR

Hm . . . But you must have noticed too that there is a change in Willy. He is so serious and so absent-minded.

EVA

I never knew him to be otherwise.

ARTHUR

But I did. He came home yesterday, all full of joy, happiness and eagerness. Rarely have I seen him so strong, so full of conscious strength.

EVA

And, and?

ARTHUR

(*Looks penetratingly at her*) And? I am asking you, for I don't understand this sudden change.

EVA

I believe you are blaming me for the change in the weather-vane of moods?

ARTHUR

Didn't you notice that Bronka came to breakfast this morning with red eyes, swollen with crying? I would swear that she cried all through the night.

EVA

You really believe then that I am to blame?

ARTHUR

Not at all. It is a question here of something quite different . . . You see — I don't wish to start an inquisition, but it is remarkable, how strangely the situation has changed since yesterday. I feel the presence of some mysterious riddle in the air . . . Yes, indeed . . . I am high-strung, and high-strung people can't very well bear the heavy sultriness before the thunder-storm.

EVA

The sultriness before the thunder-storm?

ARTHUR

It is immaterial what we call it, but there is something in the air, which a sensitive and susceptible nature like Bronka's immediately and instinctively feels . . . Do you hear how she is crying?

(BRONKA'S loud sobs are heard in the adjoining room. There is silence. ARTHUR listens with growing uneasiness. EVA walks back and forth)

ARTHUR

(Following her) Do you hear?

EVA

Psst — psst . . .

ARTHUR

(Takes her by the hand and leads her to the window) Let us be frank with each other. I do not know you, but what I have heard about you from Bronka and Willy is enough to have given me a fairly clear conception of your personality.

EVA

(Indifferently) Please don't torment me now. I know in advance what you are going to say to me.

ARTHUR

No, no, you don't know that. I have never interfered in the affairs of other people, not even in those of my brother . . .

EVA

(Interrupting) Very well, then, let us speak frankly. You have heard from Willy that there was once a close intimacy between him and me. I know that he often wrote letters to you, and that he opened his inmost soul to you. You know that he loved me, and how completely I dominated him. You know also that the snow may lay its shroud over such a love, but only to keep it warm so that it may come to life again, more ardent and passionate than ever.

ARTHUR

That is just what I meant to tell you.

EVA

Bronka on the other hand has told you of how passionately I loved her at school, that for a long time we were inseparable. Isn't it so? She told you this?

ARTHUR

Yes. She talked a great deal about it yesterday.

EVA

I had not seen her for several years, then she came to me as Willy's fiancée, radiant with happiness — Oh, so radiantly happy that I was reconciled to the thought of having her at the side of a man whom at that very time I loved with all the strength and passion of my soul.

ARTHUR

You loved Willy?

EVA

Yes — when I had lost him. (*They looked for a while fixedly at one another*) And now you were going to ask me why I have come to destroy my friend's happiness? Weren't you?

ARTHUR

Perhaps, I had that intention for a moment — but I understood immediately, that such a question would be utterly futile. To be honest, I have to confess, that I haven't any great liking for you, we have too little in common . . . but that does not prevent my being just . . . (*Suddenly*) You have always wanted something? (*EVA, with her fore-head pressed against the window-pane, remains silent*) All your desire, your life long, has been to bind to yourself a man, who with never-appeased desire, is to seek for you everywhere, and never to find you, but who yet is blindly to follow you?

EVA

(*Ardently*) Yes!

ARTHUR

Willy?

EVA

(*Firmly*) Yes!

ARTHUR

And Bronka?

EVA

Can't you hear how happily she is laughing now?
Do you know what will happen next?

ARTHUR

Well?

EVA

Bronka will now throw herself around my neck, and humbly and sincerely ask my pardon for having made a scene . . . Look, what a glorious moonlight — hand me my furs — shall we take a little walk? Perhaps, it may lead to speaking with even greater frankness . . . (*She suddenly looks piercingly at ARTHUR*) For surely you are not going to deny . . .

ARTHUR

What?

EVA

That you love Bronka.

ARTHUR

(*Looks at her for a long time*) Yes . . . yes!

EVA

Do you hear her laugh? Oh, this silvery girl's laughter!

ARTHUR

Let us go . . .

(*At this very moment, BRONKA and WILLY enter the room hand in hand, apparently happy*)

BRONKA

(*To EVA*) Don't go now, Eva, don't leave. You know how I have always been. All of you have always been much too good to me. You spoiled me with your kindness, Willy has carried on your work, and now you are surprised when I have moods. Eva, dear, darling Eva, you know best of all, that I am half crazy; I have moments when I am absolutely irresponsible.

EVA

Why so sad, why ask my forgiveness? (*She caresses her cheeks*) Oh, you sensitive plant, how overwrought and nervous you are!

BRONKA

One can forgive a child, because it can't keep its nerves under control, but not me. (*Nervously and rapidly*) You see, sometimes such strange thoughts come to me . . . No, that isn't it, not that . . . It is something, like once before . . . it is really only like a shadow of something terrible about to happen. Actually it is, perhaps, only the memory, the far-away, far-away memory of the awful hours which I experienced as a child, a long time ago when I hunted in vain all through the house and all over the large

park for my sister. Only a moment before I had seen her, and now where is she? I was absolutely sure that something terrible had happened to her, and I ran into the forest and hunted her there for hours, and returned frightened to death, breathless, only half-conscious. (*She clings nervously to EVA*) Eva, Eva, it seemed to me that something was pursuing me, dragging me back by the hair and pulling and pulling . . . and in front of the veranda I fell flat on the grass. I buried my face in my hands, so that I might hear nothing, but I heard heavy, dull, seeking foot-steps. And they came closer and closer and closer.

EVA

Who?

BRONKA

Peasants were carrying my sister, my darling sister, on a stretcher — she had fallen into the pond and drowned . . .

EVA

Drowned in the pond?

BRONKA

Yes, in the pond.

EVA

(*Persisting*) Pond?

BRONKA

Yes, of course, in the pond. (*To WILLY*) Let

us have our pond filled in. It always reminds me of the black, dull light of that other pond.

WILLY

Come, Bronka, be calm. I will do whatever you want. (*He looks challengingly at EVA. BRONKA clings more and more closely to EVA*) If you want it, I will level everything here to the ground. Yes, I'll do that. I'll have the trees cut down, the pond filled up, just say so!

EVA

Perhaps, you will also have the earth swept clean of snow . . . Oh, you children, children . . . Now Willy too is all on edge.

BRONKA

What did I do, Willy, to irritate you?

WILLY

But, Bronka dear, you haven't irritated me at all. You know it makes me sad that you can't even here with me forget your terrible childhood memories.

EVA

(*Stroking her cheeks*) Come, forget, forget! Gentlemen, leave us alone for a while. Bronka knows how fond I am of her; I have always succeeded in quieting her, and driving away even her saddest memories.

ARTHUR

You are right. Come, Willy, come!

WILLY

And you will calm yourself, Bronka?

BRONKA

See how quiet I am already, but please go. I am so happy alone with Eva. We have such a lot to say to each other.

(ARTHUR and WILLY leave for the adjoining room)

ARTHUR

(In the doorway, to EVA) You said something about a walk in the moonlight . . .

EVA

Later, later, when Bronka is herself again.

BRONKA

Oh, then we'll all go together.

EVA

No, no, dearie. You'll be nice, and stay right here. Willy will come. Newly-married people should be together a lot. And you mustn't get upset again . . .

(ARTHUR leaves at the last words)

BRONKA

Am I really so insufferable, Eva?

EVA

(*Thoughtfully*) Oh, no, no! But I am surprised at this sudden attack of nerves in you.

BRONKA

But you aren't offended with me?

EVA

No, I wouldn't blame you even if . . .

BRONKA

(*Agitated, as if she were guessing EVA's thoughts*)
If, if . . .

EVA

Even if this change in you toward me . . .
(*Breaking off*) Come, be honest, Bronka. There is some incomprehensible fear in you . . . perhaps, it isn't fear at all, but you no longer have the same trust and confidence in me as formerly.

BRONKA

I am honest and frank. I will tell you everything . . . You see, you have changed so . . .

EVA

(*Smiling*) Have I changed?

BRONKA

Yes, it is difficult for me to find my way about with you now; I can't any longer find my Eva of two years ago. Sometimes it seems that a whole eternity

has passed since you held me close to you the last time, so warmly and affectionately, since you shared my happiness so joyously when Willy became engaged to me.

EVA

(*As if far away*) Yes, an eternity has passed since then.

BRONKA

You see, that is why I am looking so helplessly and with such unutterable fear at the bottom of this eternity . . . Now you see, why the black, dull eye of the pond frightens me so. (EVA *strokes her hair*) I don't know what sort of a dread has suddenly come over me . . . Perhaps, I did catch a bit of a cold today. Perhaps, I am not wholly in my senses today, for the touch of your hand seems different now from what it used to be. It used to be as if you wished to brand me with a stigma of love, and now you are so distant, so far away . . . You know, you know — I am feeling exactly what it is now. (*With her eyes closed she runs her fingers over EVA's hands*) It is as if an autumnal yearning were sweeping yellow leaves down an avenue of chestnuts.

EVA

Yearning?

BRONKA

Yes, yearning! Oh, how afraid I am of this, your

yearning! Do you remember when we were still at school, how I was always afraid of your wild, passionate love? Now I am much more afraid of your yearning. Tell me, Eva, why have you filled me with this fear?

EVA

Listen, Bronka! You are overwrought now, but I understand everything that is passing in your soul. Consciously I do not feel the slightest change in my love for you. But it may be that actually I have changed. You are no longer mine, undividedly mine, as you once were. You love your husband, and, perhaps unconsciously, it is something intangible that is making you afraid . . . Ah, I know what it is. (*She laughs*) My darling, perhaps, you are jealous of Willy? Tell me! Tell me honestly!

BRONKA

No, no, no, I am not jealous, but I am afraid of something, something . . .

EVA

Of what?

BRONKA

Of your beauty.

EVA

How do you mean that?

BRONKA

How do I mean it? You see, the finest, most beau-

tiful woman might be around Willy all the time, and I wouldn't be the least bit afraid of her for I know that Willy wouldn't even notice her. But your beauty is something entirely different. You are beautiful in a different way . . . You awaken a yearning and a desire, the like of which one has never known before. You can chain people to you and draw them after you, without yourself knowing that any one is following you, and this some one doesn't know either whither your magic is leading him . . . He merely follows, and goes on and on, blindly.

EVA

Where to?

BRONKA

I don't know, I don't know. You see, I don't understand it at all, I can only feel it, sense it. Something is biting and gnawing at my brain, and I don't know what it is . . . (*Thoughtfully*) Arthur told me yesterday that there is a point in which all opposites meet . . . I don't quite remember how he explained it, but something like this — that an infinitely great sphere would become a plane surface, and in my own mind I thought that the black funnel of the pond might go down to such infinite depth, that what was depth might fuse with the height of the heavens . . . (*Thoughtfully*) Where to? Either into the black abyss of the pond, or upward toward the endless distances of the heavens.

EVA

Where did you get such thoughts?

BRONKA

(Looks at her penetratingly, then with a slight smile) Yes, Eva dear, we no longer understand each other . . . *(With sudden tenderness)* See, now, that some sort of clarity is gleaming through my presentiments and fear, now that I am beginning to unriddle what was disturbing the depth of my soul, now I am grateful to you, and I am feeling closer to you again. And the strange thing is — that in me too a mysterious yearning is awakening . . . Perhaps I am too weak, really to yearn . . . to bear the torments of yearning . . .

EVA

For what should you yearn? Hasn't your every desire been fulfilled?

BRONKA

One hasn't yet, not yet.

EVA

And do you know what it is?

BRONKA

Not yet, not yet.

(There is silence)

ARTHUR

(*Entering restlessly. To BRONKA*) Well? Are you feeling better now?

BRONKA

(*Suddenly gay again*) Oh, come now? Do you want to see me distressed again? I have had more than enough of your philosophy of opposites which meet at some point or other.

ARTHUR

(*Jestingly*) You haven't expressed yourself very exactly, but as for that you can see the fact in yourself. A little while ago, sad and moody, now gay again.

BRONKA

Not thanks to you, however. Quite on the contrary. Your tired and bored manner would be quite enough to drive any one to desperation.

ARTHUR

Just wait till to-morrow, you will be much worse.

BRONKA

Many thanks.

ARTHUR

(*To EVA*) Perhaps, you feel like a little walk now. I have asked Willy in the meantime to look after a business matter for me about which I don't know a blessed thing . . .

EVA

And you, Bronka, lie down now and forget your whims and troubles . . .

(She puts her arms around BRONKA, lays her out tenderly on the chaise longue and covers her with a shawl)

BRONKA

Oh, I am feeling so happy, so happy. (EVA and ARTHUR leave. BRONKA remains lying down for a while, then slowly raises herself, listening anxiously. She then takes a letter out of her pocket, looks at it for a long time, kisses it, covers her face with it, and weeps softly) Willy, my darling, my only own Willy!

CURTAIN

ACT III

ACT III

BRONKA and WILLY are seen through the brightly illuminated windows slowly entering the drawing-room. It is early morning. The sun lies purple on the snow. BRONKA enters first, followed by WILLY.

BRONKA

Nowhere peace, I can't find peace anywhere . . . Nowhere — nowhere . . . And I would nestle close, close to you, and find a little, just a tiny little bit of peace here by you . . . Willy, Willy — What is this thing that has suddenly come over us?

WILLY

But you dear, precious child — have you forgotten how you cried, when I had to leave you for a week?

BRONKA

Oh, no — no . . . That was something entirely different . . . Then it was merely the fear of a spoiled child of having to stay alone, and the fear of my hunger for you — just imagine, I wasn't to see you for a whole week.

WILLY

And now? What about now? I am here with you, with you day and night.

BRONKA

And your soul — where does your soul wander?

WILLY

My soul? (*Seriously*) It is always and ever with you.

BRONKA

(*Hastily*) With me? Tell me again, that your soul is always with me . . .

WILLY

(*Firmly*) Always!

(*He walks restlessly up and down the room.*

BRONKA follows his movements)

BRONKA

Always with me?

WILLY

I have never loved you more strongly, felt you closer to me than just now — to-night . . . But I must confess that there have been times in the past when I felt a senseless yearning, which tore my heart and brain asunder . . .

BRONKA

(*Hurriedly interrupting him*) Yearning? yearn-

ing? You were tormented with yearning? For what, for what did you yearn?

WILLY

Hush, Bronka, hush . . . You know very well how much I love you. I have never had any desire for anything except . . .

BRONKA

(*More and more intensely*) Except? — Tell me, what?

WILLY

(*Stroking her hair*) Except for desire . . .

BRONKA

What? A desire for desire? What does that mean?

WILLY

Why are you so frightened? Let me talk over things quietly with you. Come sit down — here by my side — I will tell you everything . . . a desire for desire . . . Hm, how can I explain that . . . Do you know, I was a mere lad, but even then I buried myself in the earth out of pure yearning. I didn't know what to do with myself for I yearned to fulfill my desire of achieving something greater and stronger and more beautiful than had ever been accomplished by any one before.

BRONKA

Perhaps, it is I who have kept you from accomplishing this?

WILLY

No, Bronka, no . . . That was a long time ago . . . I felt then so bursting with energy that I believed I could create out of myself an entire world . . . Yes, indeed! . . . I wanted to absorb all there was of science, I grubbed around in the old, old rubbish of human knowledge, I travelled all over the earth, that I might achieve this sacred command within me — to accomplish something great and important.

BRONKA

And I — I, a poor, miserable woman, kept you from doing it.

WILLY

No, no — a thousand times no! It was something entirely different . . . (*Thoughtfully*) Arthur and I are the last of our race. Arthur has never felt this desire — besides, how do I know? Perhaps he, too, has felt this desire . . .

(*There is silence for a while*)

BRONKA

Tell me, tell me more of this.

WILLY

I have nothing more to say.

BRONKA

And with me, here, with me you lost that desire?

WILLY

How can I answer that? I . . . (*He stammers*)
I suddenly acquired such a feeling of impotence — I
grew so tired and resigned — I felt such a strange
wish for peace, for a soothing hand . . .

BRONKA

Then I was only a soft pillow for your head, tired
out by conflict?

WILLY

(*Sadly*) Why are you so angry with me?

BRONKA

I am not angry at all, but it makes me almost frantic when I remember that I didn't mean anything to you except a plaything, a sweet playmate with whom it was comfortable and pleasant to chat there in that cursed, diabolical corner by the fireplace.

WILLY

Please, Bronka, please calm yourself. Why can't you listen quietly until I have finished with what I am going to tell you? The one thing I do want to tell you is that I have found peace and happiness with you, that with you I have lost that tormenting yearning, for in you I realized every yearning.

BRONKA

(*Looks at him for a long time and takes hold of his hands*) And why have you begun again to yearn for your desire?

WILLY

(*With a slight smile*) And why do you yearn for *this*, that you have never felt a yearning before?

(*There is silence*)

BRONKA

You are right. You asked me a moment ago, why I am so sad and overwrought, at this very time, when you returned to me so strong and so sure of happiness — and, and — (*Passionately*) and filled with such mad yearning for — for — Eva! For *your* Eva!

WILLY

(*Startled*) For Eva?

BRONKA

(*No longer able to control herself*) For Eva, yes, for Eva! Do you believe, I didn't see how startled you were, when she stood there on the threshold? Do you believe that I am merely a plaything, a mere soft pillow, incapable of feeling the terrible yearning which is tearing you from me by force? (*She clutches at him but then falls in a heap impotently; she looks at him as if only half-conscious*) Forgive me, Willy . . . I have found fault with you because

of your yearning . . . They were unjust reproaches . . . For hasn't the spear of my desire also flown far above your head.

WILLY

(*Significantly*) Of your desire? For what?

BRONKA

For Eva, for Eva, for Eva!

WILLY

And she has inflamed you with yearning too?

BRONKA

(*Breaks down*) Yes, me too!

ARTHUR

(*Enters, surprised*) What! Up already? Why so early?

WILLY

(*With assumed composure*) I was just going to ask you, why up and about so early?

ARTHUR

Hm — I? I read all night long, then I wanted to wake myself up and went out for a walk. As I was coming back, I was very much surprised to see light in your rooms, and came to see whether anything had gone wrong, and now I am going to bed.

BRONKA

No, no — nothing has gone wrong — what is there

that might happen? Only your everlasting questions as to the cause and purpose of life, the riddle of being and not being, the seeking for something that can't be had and which doesn't even exist — all this made me sleepless and kept me so wide-awake that I begrudged Willy every second of sleep . . .

WILLY

(*Concerned*) But, Bronka, you will lie down now? (*He kisses her hands*) Please, Bronka, go to sleep — I will also rest for a while now.

BRONKA

No, no! Not now! And you, Arthur, stay here with us. Both of us love you so much, and it is sweet and restful to have you with us . . .

ARTHUR

(*With a careless smile*) Do you hear, Willy? Now that you are back, Bronka likes to have me about — I am now like a nice piece of furniture which is discreetly shoved aside, and then again pulled to its old position of honor, according as . . .

BRONKA

Oh, you horrible man, you . . .

ARTHUR

(*To Willy*) While you were away she told me that I was unbearable, that I dragged a thick at-

mosphere of boredom and weariness into your home . . . every minute she ran away to wake up Eva.

BRONKA

(*Suddenly*) Do you hear, Willy? I don't know how to explain it. Eva did nothing but sleep all the time before you returned, it was a sort of disease . . .

WILLY

(*Absent-mindedly*) She slept all the time? (*Rises and walks about the room*) You see, Arthur, your affairs are in a very bad shape and horribly mixed up. I am thinking about them all the time, but papers are lacking. Perhaps they have overcharged you on the bills; you have always had the habit of letting people swindle you . . . (*Gaily*) Bronka, I have a brilliant idea. Get dressed, have them get breakfast, and let them harness the horses to the sleigh — and then, head over heels out through the fields and meadows and forest . . .

BRONKA

Yes, yes . . . Through the fields and meadows and forest — Oh, how beautiful, how glorious that will be! (*She loosens the top-knot and spreads out a flooding mass of hair with the fingers*) And my hair in the wind, in the mad pace of your wild horses — see my hair . . . thus, thus . . . (*She quickly arranges her hair*) And to breathe in, suck in with the full breast

the life of the blue distances before us — (*She takes a deep breath and stretches out her arms. Suddenly, with an arch side-long glance at ARTHUR*) Look, Willy, how surprised Arthur is! He does not believe me capable of feeling a yearning for thunder and lightning and snowstorms and endless blue distances . . .

ARTHUR

Not at all, I wasn't a bit surprised — I merely envy all people who can still feel a yearning for such things.

BRONKA

Do you hear, Willy? How simple-minded he is! He envies people who feel yearnings . . . But now, Willy, please go . . . and put his affairs in order — that won't take very long, will it?

WILLY

An hour at the most.

BRONKA

(*Artfully*) In the meantime I will teach Arthur how to yearn.

WILLY

A very good idea . . .

(*Exit*)

BRONKA

(*Goes softly to the curtains at the door and looks out into the corridor; then she approaches ARTHUR*)

and seizes his hand) Do you know where he has gone now?

ARTHUR

Yes, I know.

BRONKA

You know? You can't know. You think he has gone to look after your affairs?

ARTHUR

I hardly think so.

BRONKA

(Passionately) He has gone to see Eva, to Eva!
(There is a silence) Must it be thus?

ARTHUR

Such happens to be the destiny of man. When this terrible mad desire for something beyond yourself begins to gnaw and tear at you, when no happiness and no joy can any longer fill your soul, when nothing can master the unrest within, or subdue the mad storm which drives you into this agonizing flight from yourself and the rest of the world, out beyond even the greatest crimes — then it must be thus.

BRONKA

And it is stronger than the storm which in spring tears the oaks with their roots from the earth?

ARTHUR

Stronger.

BRONKA

Unconquerable and irresistible?

ARTHUR

Unconquerable and irresistible.

BRONKA

(Mysteriously) Is it stronger than Eva?

ARTHUR

Unfortunately, no.

BRONKA

No — you said? No? *(Despairingly)* Tell me, why not stronger, why not?

ARTHUR

Eva is Willy's yearning. Perhaps he doesn't even desire her, perhaps he doesn't even see her or feel her presence when she is with him, but it is as if she had taken possession of him, as if she were driving him into a wild flight and scourging him to inaccessible heights or into bottomless depths.

BRONKA

And this mad pursuit for what — for what?

ARTHUR

No one knows, no human brain has ever understood it, nor ever will.

(There is silence)

BRONKA

And what shall I, poor woman, do? And I also have a yearning, I yearn so immeasurably, but it is for his soul — his soul. Oh my God, how blind I was, how deaf and dazzled my soul was in its unreasoning love — and it is only now that I understand that he never belonged to me.

ARTHUR

(*Sadly*) Listen, Bronka, I did not want to loosen the film from the eyes of your soul. I knew very well, all too well, that he never belonged to you, and that is why I was sad. I masked my sadness with boredom and indifference, for I hoped — I always hoped that something would come to scatter the ominous clouds . . .

BRONKA

Why didn't you tell me right away? I might have had time to get used to the thought, and now everything has fallen upon me like a bolt of lightning. My soul is like a willow, struck by lightning. Shivered into a thousand splinters round about the roots which out of pure terror have been torn loose from the earth. Why didn't you tell me? Why didn't you open my eyes?

ARTHUR

Listen to me, Bronka, but quietly — very quietly.
(*A pause. He moves toward her and takes both her*

hands) You will soon understand, why I didn't tell you earlier.

BRONKA

You look so strange — what is the matter?

ARTHUR

What is the matter? Now at last you are beginning to divine what you should have seen clearly weeks ago? (*BRONKA looks at him almost shyly with a frightened expression*) Don't be afraid. I will tell you everything openly and honestly. Slowly during the course of the long weeks I began to love you with my first love, for, Bronka, I have never loved before. My soul was cold and white, like the snow out there. Why I came to love you, why my love grew stronger and stronger from hour to hour, and deeper and more holy, you will understand, if you will recall all the things I have told you about myself. Besides — that is of no importance . . . (*Looks at her with a quiet smile*) Don't be so frightened. It might be right for you to be frightened and angry and to leave the room if I pleaded and begged for your love. I don't want it. I won't have it. Even if I knew that you returned my love, I would toss your love aside. Not because you are my sister-in-law, but because your soul has already rubbed against another, and perhaps one that is stronger than mine.

BRONKA

Hush, hush, my Arthur, I don't understand you.

ARTHUR

It isn't at all necessary. I can think of you day and night, I can love you and caress you with the most devout tenderness in my dreams. I can entirely forget that you are my brother's wife, and yet never, not even for a second have I thought of you with the remotest thought in a way unworthy of the mistress of our ancestral home and of the wife of my brother whom I love as do you.

BRONKA

(*Gently stroking his hair*) Say no more about it, no more.

ARTHUR

Of course, I shall not speak of my love again. But can't you understand the yearning of a man who has always lived in the filth and loathsomeness of life? I wanted to seize the will-o'-the-wisp which flies above the filth and morass of life, I wanted, I longed so endlessly to say these words: I love! And I have said them.

(*They are silent. Their hands are clasped intimately.*)

ARTHUR

(*After a pause*) I am happy to have closed accounts with my life so beautifully . . . My only con-

cern, my only trouble is how you are going to bear everything.

BRONKA

(*With deepest fright*) Bear what? — what?

ARTHUR

Listen, Bronka, I have been watching with deep admiration and happiness how the human being in you has been waking in the last few days, how it has steadily grown stronger and more conscious; I have seen with what effort and torment you began to grow conscious of all the things that slumbered in the bottom of your soul. It intoxicated and made glad in me, not the human being, but the artist, when you began to create new words for all that to which your soul gave a new birth in terrible agony . . . Bronka, be strong and beautiful; seize at the right moment, while it is still raised, the stroke of the hammer which is to crush your head.

BRONKA

(*Greatly wrought up*) What is to crush me?

ARTHUR

(*Hard*) Willy never belonged to you, and he never will. His soul will fly away from you, and if you wish to have a dead body by your side, well, then you may.

BRONKA

You lie!

ARTHUR

(*Sadly*) If it weren't that I would despise your love, I might possibly lie, and out of hatred and jealousy try to wound your soul. But I am telling you all this only to harden your soul against the blows which will fall upon you.

BRONKA

(*Absently*) Very well! I shall now be strong and beautiful. And you — will you help me?

ARTHUR

In what can I help you?

BRONKA

(*With a low cry*) I shall kill them — kill them, kill! And you shall help me!

ARTHUR

I? No!

BRONKA

(*Laughs contemptuously*) And you, you said that you loved me? You whose words I understood to mean that you were willing to make every sacrifice, now you are scared? Are you afraid now?

ARTHUR

I am not scared, I am not afraid, but I don't understand why I should aid in a stupid, purposeless and criminal piece of business, which can only have its

roots in the madness of the female, never, never in the beauty of a woman who is also a human being.

BRONKA

(More and more violently) Do you know what you are saying? Have you no blood in your veins? No heart? What sort of a love is this of yours? Your love, then, is nothing but intoxication with beautiful words, the pleasure of dreaming about love?

ARTHUR

(Looking at her a long time) An insane grief is speaking through you — besides, you are right. I am incapable of your kind of love, and, perhaps, I am too strong for your blood-thirsty love, your blood-thirsty virtue, and your blood-thirsty crimes . . .

(He rises and goes slowly toward the door)

BRONKA

(Dismayed, runs after him, seizes him by the hand, and draws him back into the room) Don't leave me, don't leave me, my brother, my only brother, you — See, I am myself again already. You are the only one who has ever spoken to my soul. See, Arthur, see, I too have a soul, a poor, tormented soul, but it is strong enough to understand the full beauty and goodness of your words, to give shelter within me to a little bit, at least, of your sadness and your yearning. For tell me, truly, you too, have a yearning.

ARTHUR

I no longer feel it — no longer now. Through you my yearning has found its completion.

BRONKA

(*Without thinking*) Through me — through me — through me . . . (*With a sudden gaiety*) Really, Arthur, really? Have you really told me that you love me?

ARTHUR

(*Thoughtfully*) Yes, I told you that.

BRONKA

And you told me that you would despise me if I returned your love?

ARTHUR

Yes, I said that.

BRONKA

And you said that you were too proud and too clean to sully even with the remotest thought of desire the mistress of your ancestral home and the wife of your brother?

ARTHUR

Yes, I said that.

BRONKA

(*With a sudden heart-felt abandonment*) Oh, you darling, golden-hearted brother of mine, you!

(Takes his head and presses it against her breast. As if half-awake) My soul is so worn out, I am so tired and so sleepy. I would that you would rock me to and fro, to and fro, to sleep, rock me as in a cradle into a deep sleep, a silent eternal sleep . . . You are so infinitely good . . . Arthur, do you know what I am?

ARTHUR

Yes, I know.

BRONKA

Tell me, tell me, what am I?

ARTHUR

You are snow, pure, white snow, which falls upon the frosty earth. It keeps her warm and soft, and it wraps the numb corpse in its white, warm coverings, until it comes to life again, and until new germs of life begin to rise from her lap . . .

BRONKA

And all the while people believed the corpse would never come to life again?

ARTHUR

They believed that it had congealed in the frost, fallen to nothing, decayed . . .

BRONKA

And the earth sprouts forth again and again in a newer, richer life — yes, yes, I am the snow . . .

(*Suddenly*) Why doesn't Eva sleep? (ARTHUR *listens*) Do you hear? Do you hear? She is coming downstairs now, in a moment she will be here . . . I am so strangely gay and happy. (*She takes him in her arms and tries to rock him to and fro*) Sleep, my little bear, sleep . . . Go to sleep, you naughty, naughty child . . . (EVA *stands in the door and watches the entire scene apparently in a gay mood. BRONKA looks gayly at her*) Sleep, my little bear, sleep! Don't want to sleep? Well, you might at least say how do you do to Eva.

ARTHUR

(*With assumed gaiety*) How do you do!

BRONKA

(*Greeting EVA*) Just imagine, Eva, how early all of us have gotten up to-day . . . To-day is Christmas-day, I think. It was a custom among us to beat children with switches on this day, to fix the day in their memory. I suppose that is why I woke up so early . . .

EVA

But you are wrong, they do that only on Good Friday . . .

BRONKA

Hm, that is immaterial . . . But look at my bear, so large and so gentle.

ARTHUR

Bronka is in the best of humors to-day.

BRONKA

You are right . . . I feel just like the naughty girl who used to climb to the very tops of the poplars which stood around the horrible black pond.

EVA

And again this black pond?

BRONKA

Good Lord, what does it matter? — The black pond or a razor, the gallows or the wheels of a train, or, as an example of a peaceful death, the one in your own bed . . . Death, death . . . no matter when or where or how . . . (*Suddenly interrupts herself*) Eva, just look at this solemn old fellow of an Arthur; he looks just like my tremendous uncle on whose back I used to ride myself half to death.

EVA

Ah, how gay you are.

BRONKA

(*Taking her hands tenderly*) You see, such a stupid sadness, stupid yearning often comes over me, that it makes life miserable both for myself and for others, but it soon passes, and then I am twice as gay . . . (*A little wearily*) But see — my bear is good for nothing. Oh, Arthur, what a bore you are,

what a bore . . . What do you say, Eva, to running out into the garden; the snow reaches to our hips . . . Just imagine, Eva, the joy of wading about in the snow, of scattering it about with breast and legs, so that the earth may the sooner be free for its new life . . .

EVA

(*Indifferently*) Bronka is beginning to hatch out new absurdities again. In morning negligee and slippers?

BRONKA

Why not? I am hardened to it, and you are dressed . . . Do come, Eva dear, come, you are cold, frozen through, and I will rub you with snow and you will become quite warm, I will rub your face with big, big snowballs and wash your hair with snow — Oh, if you only knew how warming snow is, how good it is for cold hands and frozen hearts.

EVA

Oh, no, Bronka, no! (*With always the same mysterious smile*) I don't need any snow. I feel perfectly happy with my cold hands and frozen heart. Snow doesn't yet have to fall upon my soul to keep it warm.

BRONKA

(*With a long look at her*) No? Really not? . . . Well then, Arthur, come; you and I will run out into the snow. And you will let me roll you about in

the snow? I'll make a glorious snowman out of you. (*She indicates it with gestures*) Here, I'll stick on two pieces of coal and you will have eyes; here, a lump of dirty earth, it will be your nose; — here, I'll draw a line, it will make the mouth — and then a pipe . . . Eva, Eva, why don't you come with us? Come, Arthur, come! (*She drags him along*) Eva — Willy will be here right away! (*She runs with ARTHUR into the corridor and her voice is heard outside*) Willy, Willy, Eva is alone inside! Go, join her, and get breakfast ready for us.

(*EVA is left alone; she walks over toward the window, looks for a while out into the garden, drums on the window-pane, and then sits down by the fireplace, coldly and gravely*)

WILLY

(*Enters, looks about, takes an armchair, and sits down beside EVA*) Do you want me to say good-morning to you? (*EVA remains silent*) Do you want me to ask, who it was that called me?

EVA

(*Raises her head as if in a dream*) Bronka called you. She has run out into the snow in her breakfast-gown and slippers. She said it was so glorious to tear apart the waves of snow with the breast . . . Aren't you afraid, she may catch a cold?

WILLY

(*Absent-mindedly*) All that doesn't matter now.

EVA

Aren't you jealous of Arthur? (WILLY *looks at her, but does not reply*) Where have you been just now?

WILLY

Alone with myself.

EVA

And with me?

WILLY

(*Enraged*) With myself, I've told you.

EVA

(*Stroking his hands*) Why so angry that from now on you must always be with me, always by my side?

WILLY

Always be with you, always by your side? With you? I'd a thousand times rather be dead.

EVA

(*Thoughtfully*) When I crossed your threshold . . . Oh, no, it isn't that I wanted to talk about . . . That was merely a moment . . . But later when you came home, and I stood there, there as if rooted to the spot — I didn't hear what you were saying, but when it seemed to me that you were happy, then I hesitated to enter the sacred grove of your happiness.

WILLY

(*As if waking out of a deep sleep*) Where is Bronka?

EVA

Bronka of her own free-will went out to plow up the snow with her breast so that the seed which is locked up in the frozen earth of your soul may the sooner begin to germinate.

WILLY

(*Hesitates, looks at EVA, then stares into the fire. Suddenly*) What then, what do you want?

EVA

(*Hard*) What do I want? You don't know yet? I want you!

WILLY

That will never happen! (*Madly*) I would sooner smash your head to bits, stamp you into the ground like a worm; I would sooner because of my desire for you split my own head open, you damned demon, rather than have that happen.

EVA

(*Looks at him with rapture*) Oh, how beautiful you now are, and how beautiful is the strength with which you love me!

WILLY

(*Seizing her hands*) I hate you!

EVA

I know it, I know it, and so much the more do I love you and worship your love.

WILLY

I don't deny my love; I don't deny my agonizing, mad passion for you, but I won't make this sacrifice for you, and I swear to you, that this, that you want, will never happen.

EVA

It must happen.

WILLY

(*With suppressed rage*) Never, I swear to you, will it happen, never — never . . .

EVA

(*Motionless, with wide-open eyes*) To-day it shall happen.

(*Voices are heard quarreling in the corridor*)

WILLY

(*Listening*) What does that mean? (*He rings. After a pause, THE FOOTMAN enters*) Who is quarreling? What is the matter?

THE FOOTMAN

A woman has come, and insists upon speaking with madame,

WILLY

Why didn't you take her to the kitchen, and let her wait there?

THE FOOTMAN

I told her so, but she won't go to the kitchen — she says she has the same right to madame as her own mother.

WILLY

(Brushing across his forehead) Send her in.

(A pause. A STRANGE WOMAN enters. She is sombre and very grave, she looks around, and then speaks quietly and with self-assurance)

THE STRANGE WOMAN

They didn't want to let me come in, they told me to wait in the kitchen, but I have the right to enter through the same door through which the proudest lords and ladies enter this house.

WILLY

(With deep fright) What is the meaning of this?
(EVA, whose back is turned to WILLY and THE STRANGE WOMAN, suddenly breaks out into loud laughter. WILLY pays no attention to EVA's laughter and takes the hand of THE STRANGE WOMAN)
Now, come, tell me, what is the meaning of this?

THE STRANGE WOMAN

(Points with the finger to EVA) I know that woman there, and she knows me too. *(EVA turns suddenly toward THE STRANGE WOMAN. They look searchingly into each other's eyes; EVA slowly turns toward the fire)* Allow me to sit down here in the corner, and wait for your wife. She is my dearest, my best beloved child. I have tended her, nursed her, brought her up.

(She sits down by the door; WILLY draws back. Suddenly BRONKA, all covered with snow, bursts in through the door, followed by ARTHUR; she throws herself into WILLY's arms)

BRONKA

Warm me, Willy, warm me — throw me into the fire, see, see, I am trembling all over.

WILLY

(Freeing himself from her) Your old nurse has come.

BRONKA

(Draws back, looks anxiously around, suddenly sees THE STRANGE WOMAN, and rushes toward her) Oh, you, my mother, my only dearest darling, you here? Oh, how good it is that you have come, that you are here!

CURTAIN

ACT IV

ACT IV

Behind the windows the bluish gleam of the snow under the light of a late winter afternoon is seen. BRONKA enters with an agonized expression. In her hands she has a crumpled letter. She goes to the window, looks out into the garden, then spreads out and smooths the letter, and reads with stifled voice.

BRONKA

(Reading) "You my only, my best beloved Bronka"— *(She lets the letter sink down)* Only Bronka, yes, yes, the only one . . . I am truly only and alone in all the world . . . Yes, really! I and Motruna, Motruna. *(She rings and then absently looks down on the ground before her)* Motruna, my nurse — and she also brought up my sister — only later to lay her out in the coffin . . . Oh, this pond, this black pond . . .

THE FOOTMAN

(Entering) Madame rang?

BRONKA

Yes! Have the snow swept from the pond. (THE

FOOTMAN *stands in silence.* BRONKA *impatiently*)
What are you waiting for?

THE FOOTMAN

There was a heavy fall of snow a couple of hours ago, the work will take long.

BRONKA

What of it? Call out all the village, the pond must be as smooth as a mirror—have them cut holes in the ice and get the fishermen to prepare everything . . . we are going fishing to-day.

THE FOOTMAN

I shall do everything madame commands.

BRONKA

(*Very irritated*) But everything must be done quickly, right away, right away . . . (THE FOOTMAN *bows and is about to leave*) Where is Mr. Arthur?

THE FOOTMAN

He has locked himself in his room, and left word
. . .

BRONKA

Left word?

THE FOOTMAN

That he would not come down to-day because he has to work.

BRONKA

Go and tell him that I beg him to come down.
(THE FOOTMAN bows and is again about to leave.
BRONKA absently and self-consciously) Have you
seen the master?

THE FOOTMAN

He went out into the forest a little while ago.

BRONKA

(Uneasily) Alone?

THE FOOTMAN

No, he went with the lady who is now staying here.

BRONKA

Ah . . . (Thoughtfully) Ask Motruna, that she
please come to me right away, ask her please to come
right away, ask her please to hurry . . . and see that
everything is quickly gotten ready for fishing . . .
(THE FOOTMAN leaves. BRONKA clasps her head and
walks about the room) Alone, alone, alone . . . He
went with Eva — Arthur has locked himself in . . .
And in all the house only Motruna and I . . . Oh,
oh, oh . . . And hardly two days ago I was the only
one to him and to-day, to-day . . . (She again un-
folds the letter) "I have been away from you hardly
a week, and I don't know what to do, I am so full of
yearning . . ." (She throws the letter on the floor)
Lies, lies! (After a little while she picks up the let-

ter and kisses it) No, no, it isn't lies! (*She caresses the letter*) It was God's will, it was God's will . . . (*MOTRUNA enters and remains standing in the doorway. BRONKA does not see her and collapses more and more*) It was God's will. (*There is silence. BRONKA starts with fright*) Who is here? (*She suddenly sees MOTRUNA*) Oh, it is you, Motruna, how good it is to have you here. (*She takes her by the hand and makes her sit down beside her*) It is good of you, that you have come. (*Looks penetratingly at her*) But tell me, what made you come so all of a sudden this long way through all this snow-storm? For many years you never thought of visiting me, your child, for since mother is dead you have been to me like a dear, real mother — why so suddenly now?

MOTRUNA

(*Thoughtfully*) Oh, no, dearie, it didn't come to me suddenly at all . . .

BRONKA

(*More and more surprised*) But you haven't aged at all — you are still as restful and quiet and good . . .

MOTRUNA

As restful and quiet and good . . .

BRONKA

Do you remember, Motruna, when I was still very,

very small, how carefully you took me out of the cradle, and how you carried me about the room whole nights long, when I was restless, and how you lulled me to sleep, so softly and gently?

MOTRUNA

I remember you very well even before you were born, before I laid you in the cradle.

BRONKA

(*Astonished*) What are you saying?

MOTRUNA

I knew you before you came upon this world. I held you close to me, warmed you, and caressed you, and kissed you to awaken you to life. (*Thoughtfully*) And now I come to close these same lids which once I opened with my kisses; to close them, not with kisses, but with these stiff, bony fingers.

BRONKA

(*Frightened*) Am I dreaming?

MOTRUNA

Are you dreaming? And what is life? A dream within a dream . . . The light of some star or other awakens us to life and it wanders and wanders, unknowing of its own destiny and that of the human beings upon whom it poured its blessings when they came upon this world . . . And then this same light returns, after many, many years, to annihilate and de-

stroy this same life which it created. (BRONKA moves slowly towards the bell. MOTRUNA smiles) Why are you afraid of me? Are you going to call your servants? . . . Perhaps you would even have me driven away from here?

(She takes BRONKA by the hand)

BRONKA

(Frightened) Your hand is so cold, so icy cold
. . .

MOTRUNA

(Looking fondly and tenderly at her) You don't know, Bronka, how much you remind me of your father now . . . He was sitting then in his study — sitting, quietly, peacefully — and then suddenly he leaped up, as if struck by lightning . . .

BRONKA

Why did he leap up?

MOTRUNA

Your sister had drowned . . .

BRONKA

What? What are you saying? What?

MOTRUNA

Your sister had drowned, I myself dragged her out of the waters, out of a pond like the one in front of your windows. I took her poor little body in my arms, I warmed it with my breath, caressed, kissed it

— nothing helped . . . I had called her into life with my kisses, and it was my fingers, too, that closed her dead lids. Your father stood in the door of the veranda like a column of stone. You lay with your face in the grass, when I passed by with my precious burden.

BRONKA

(*Looks at MOTRUNA with a bewildered expression*) Motruna, it seems to me, I am ill; I don't understand at all what you are saying to me. You called me and my sister to life, only later to close our lids with your cold fingers? That is what you said, isn't it? And then you said something about certain stars which awaken human beings to life and then wander further over the dark ways of destiny, only in the end to return and to destroy the life which they called forth? Didn't you say that? Oh, what beautiful stories you tell! . . . Tell me another . . . no, wait, wait . . . I am so sleepy . . . But there are stars too which attract people, draw them on and on. We must follow them, high up into the sky, down into the abyss, out beyond all oceans — but we must, must follow them . . . (*She pressed close to MOTRUNA*) He has followed his star, and I, I . . . Motruna, I am all alone, left all alone . . . But you will take me into your arms and carry me and lay me down at my father's feet . . . There I shall see my sister . . . and my mother again . . . Motruna, you are so rest-

ful and gentle and silent and good . . . Oh, I want to sleep, sleep . . . Stay with me, Motruna.

(She lies down on the sofa, and closes her eyes. After a pause MOTRUNA rises and looks with deep sorrow at the sleeping woman; then in grave silence she leaves the room. There is a long silence. BRONKA seems to be asleep. Suddenly ARTHUR enters and approaches BRONKA)

ARTHUR

What is the matter, Bronka?

BRONKA

(As if waking up) Oh, Arthur, Arthur — how good of you to have come . . .

ARTHUR

Have you been sleeping, Bronka?

BRONKA

I don't know . . . No, I don't know . . . My head feels so heavy, so heavy, and I, I am so alone, so lonely . . . Willy went out into the forest after Eva — and I am forsaken, so all alone, — Arthur, tell me, please, tell me, why, why I am so all alone?

ARTHUR

(Frightened) But wasn't Motruna with you?

BRONKA

(Rubbing her eyes and temples) Motruna? Mo-

truna? . . . What are you saying? I dreamed of her, of my father, of mother . . . Do you know, Arthur, I dreamed of mother — I was walking and walking over a steep, barren, dark field, and out of the terrible twilight around me there grew crosses and crosses . . . Suddenly, I saw a figure. She sat by the roadside . . . I saw nothing, heard nothing, but I felt that it was my mother . . . She was pressing a dead child to her breast . . . Oh, oh, oh! . . . Why do you look so frightened, Arthur? . . . Listen to me . . . She was looking at a second child, wandering barefoot among thorny hedges and paths, and climbing laboriously upward, upward . . . And I go on without rest, as if some one were dragging me along. Then my mother lets fall the child which she held pressed against her, and she stretches out her hands toward me. And, helplessly, tired unto death, I fall into her arms, upon her breast . . . Suddenly, as if the wind had blown away the misty shroud — I am lying in the icy embrace of a horrible skeleton! . . . Oh . . .

ARTHUR

Bronka, my poor child, you are ill . . .

BRONKA

What, I ill? What does that mean, "to be ill."
(*She looks at him a long time and then continues mysteriously*) Arthur, you told me this morning

that you loved me. Did I dream it or did you really tell me so? Did you actually say that you loved me?

ARTHUR

Yes — I told you that, and I repeat it again — I love you!

BRONKA

Oh how good that feels, how good! But you won't leave me? . . .

ARTHUR

No!

BRONKA

And you know, why Willy has left me?

ARTHUR

Yes, I know —

BRONKA

I know it too. It is this, Arthur, isn't it?

ARTHUR

What do you mean?

BRONKA

I was the snow, the good snow, which tenderly covers the earth, holds it warm . . . Am I speaking the truth?

ARTHUR

(*Lost in thought*) Yes . . . But, perhaps, you were the kind, comforting hand which stills the pain of a wounded bird . . . He felt happy with you as

long as he was ill, and now new wings have grown, the muscles have become stronger — there is no longer any need to prepare for flight, he has already, already tried his wings . . .

BRONKA

(*Horried*) Oh, don't talk that way, that way!

ARTHUR

(*Nervously*) And yet I shall talk about it. Willy wants to fly away from you with Eva.

BRONKA

With Eva? With Eva? — who is she? What is she?

ARTHUR

Who and what is she? . . . She is my dream and the burden of your sorrow. She is Willy's demonic desire! . . . That is what she is, that . . . (*Smiling*) Haven't you understood yet? . . . Well then, listen. She is my dream for I needed her to be able to view you in your whole strength and beauty. For you she represents terror and misery for you feel that she is leading you into the abyss of despair. You are divining, seeing already she is tearing Willy from you; him, for whom she is the demonic desire for immeasurable power, the revelation of that tormenting unrest which ever drew him upward, upward even to the sky!

BRONKA

(Leaps up and stands erect) Look! I am strong and cold enough to destroy both of them, her and him, to tread them underfoot. I am stronger than both of them! I shall kill, tear to pieces that woman, for I, I alone am his desire.

ARTHUR

The spear of his desire has flown out far above you.

BRONKA

(Despairingly) But Arthur, Arthur — Look at me! Look — I too am young and beautiful — For a whole eternity these words, “How beautiful you are!” were always on his lips. Why should the spear of his desire fly out beyond me?

ARTHUR

(Taking her hands and speaking softly and gently) For me you are beautiful, the great and perfect gift from above!

BRONKA

(Looks at him. Then suddenly) You are tempting me?

ARTHUR

No, Bronka, no! I have told you already this morning that I would despise you if you were to return my love. I love you as you are, in your beauty, in all your helplessness and despair! . . .

Evil things are going on in this house . . . I will be your brother — a brother, a friend — whatever you will . . .

BRONKA

You mean that seriously, Arthur?

ARTHUR

Don't you know me yet?

BRONKA

(*Caressing him*) Yes, I know you, Arthur . . . I know you, you alone in the wide world — You the only one . . . I do not love you, but I love your tender, beautiful love . . . Tell me, Arthur, what does it mean, that I am so sleepy, so tired . . .

ARTHUR

(*Concerned*) Didn't you sleep at all during the night?

BRONKA

Oh, how I tormented him, how he put me on the rack . . .

ARTHUR

What did he say to you?

BRONKA

Nothing, nothing, nothing . . . He was kind, he was gentle . . . I merely understood that the spear of his desire had flown far, far beyond me . . .

(*Suddenly crying out*) Arthur, where is Willy?

. . .

ARTHUR

He followed Eva into the forest . . .

BRONKA

(*Lost in thought*) Beyond forests, mountains, seas,—alas! and beyond this once, much loved Bronka — this now so deserted, lonely Bronka! . . . But whither, whither? . . .

ARTHUR

(*Caressing her hand*) I don't know that, I don't know . . .

BRONKA

Listen, did I merely dream it, or was Motruna really here?

ARTHUR

I only just met her in the corridor.

BRONKA

You met her in the corridor? So? . . . And tell me, who are you?

ARTHUR

(*Smiling mysteriously*) How do I know? Perhaps, I am Motruna's brother for no one has loved you as deeply as Motruna and I.

BRONKA

That is true, yes — that is true . . .

ARTHUR

Yes, that is true. From a far distance Motruna came to you, and from a far distance I have come to you, merely to tell you that I love you . . .

BRONKA

(*After a pause. Musingly*) Yes, yes . . . You and Motruna.

(THE FOOTMAN *comes in*)

THE FOOTMAN

The snow has been shovelled away.

BRONKA

Thank you! Have you had holes cut in the ice?

THE FOOTMAN

Yes.

BRONKA

You have called together the fishermen?

THE FOOTMAN

Yes.

BRONKA

Thank you! You can go!

(THE FOOTMAN *goes out*)

ARTHUR

What does this mean?

BRONKA

Nothing, it doesn't mean anything. Merely that

I am going fishing . . . (*Looks scrutinizingly into his eyes*) Do you want to go fishing with me, Arthur?

ARTHUR

Anywhere, wherever you say.

(*There is silence*)

BRONKA

(*Changing suddenly to gayness*) Do you remember our wonderful skating yesterday and the day before yesterday?

ARTHUR

(*Deep in thought*) Yes, I remember.

BRONKA

Why in such deep thought now — so wholly lost in looking at the blue distances of snow and the black stretches of forests and the endless barren fields, brooding over the seed germs beneath . . . soon they will sprout, just as soon as the snow melts.

ARTHUR

(*As in a dream*) As soon as the snow melts.

BRONKA

Do you really love me, Arthur?

ARTHUR

Yes, I love you.

BRONKA

But you know that I love only Willy?

ARTHUR

I know.

BRONKA

And you are so fine that if I should return your love you would despise it?

ARTHUR

Yes, I would despise you if with a single word or gesture you showed that you returned my love.

BRONKA

But if I asked you very, very much for something, would you be capable of granting my request?

ARTHUR

What?

BRONKA

(*Very tense*) Even that?

(*There is silence. They look into each other's eyes for a long time with mortal earnestness*)

ARTHUR

I am ready to do everything, everything for you

* * *

BRONKA

Where are the skates?

ARTHUR

Why skates?

BRONKA

Merely for appearances' sake, merely . . .

ARTHUR

As you say . . .

BRONKA

And so let it be.

ARTHUR

So let it be.

BRONKA

No other way?

ARTHUR

No! (*Smiles softly*) But why the fishermen,
why torches and laborers?

BRONKA

(*Looks at ARTHUR in surprise*) Yes, you are
right — what a silly comedy my poor wounded heart
has hatched out . . . They might save us at the last
moment.

(*She laughs, then rings*)

THE FOOTMAN

Madame wishes?

BRONKA

You can put off the fishing for to-day — to-mor-

row morning . . . to-morrow morning . . . Do you understand? (THE FOOTMAN *looks at her in surprise*) Haven't you understood me yet? To-morrow morning, to-morrow morning.

(THE FOOTMAN *bows and leaves*)

ARTHUR

Now, let us go!

BRONKA

Let us go! It really doesn't make any difference, to you, whether you are bored down here on earth or up there.

(*She laughs hysterically*)

ARTHUR

Not the slightest. Besides, have you thought of this, that my presence won't leave any other inference but an accident? (*Both laugh*) We won't even have to draw up a testament and be plagued with our last will.

BRONKA

(*Nervously getting ready*) Without testament, without testament . . . Are you ready already?

ARTHUR

Long since.

BRONKA

Let us go, let us go!

(*She looks about and takes leave of the*

room. The stage remains entirely empty for a moment. Then MOTRUNA enters, silently, and gravely. She wanders about looking into all corners)

MOTRUNA

They have gone already — They have gone already . . . My harvest, my terrible harvest . . . The one I carried upon my arms, and then I laid her in the grave . . . And now the second . . . (*She goes round about the room*) Here, here, my little dove sat . . . here, here . . . I loved her most of all . . . (*She caresses the chairs and armchairs*) Here, here, my little dove only yesterday tried to hide her tears — here my Bronka sat only this morning . . . Bronka — Bronka . . . She will never return — never come back . . . And this lovely falcon too has broken its wings . . . It had to be . . . It was God's will . . . The white lady, the shadow of her mother wanders about and calls — and calls . . . They will never return, never . . . But now I shall remain here forever . . .

(She sits down on the chair with a solemn, hieratical dignity and remains seated)

CURTAIN

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